

An Essay

On

SCROFULOUS OPHTHALMIA,



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of

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BY

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Scrofulous Ophthalmia.

Of all the diseases that afflict the human race, we have few that affect more seriously the happiness of an individual than affections of the eye; and not only is his happiness affected, but in proportion to the serious nature of the disease is his usefulness to himself and society abridged.

The sense of sight is the great bond of union, between the external world and the spiritual mind of man, and when lost in consequence of disease or injury is most distressing in its results; the unfortunate individual realizes most acutely his miserable condition, feeling that he is deprived of all the pleasures connected with its possession.

To attempt to estimate its value would be vain; such is the importance of the office

which it performs, that few, if any, would be found willing to lose it for any conceivable gratification on earth: by the exercise of its power, we survey the wondrous beauties of the natural world;—while the treasures of the vegetable kingdom, and the numberless differently constructed living beings that inhabit the earth, are presented to our minds in all their inimitable workmanship and transcendent beauty.

The eye is subject to numerous diseases many of which are of such a serious nature that the usefulness as well as the existence of it is endangered. Like all the other organs of the human system it is particularly liable to attacks of inflammatory disease, either of an acute or chronic character involving in many cases its very existence.

There is one peculiar form of inflammation affecting the eyes, of which it is my intention to speak - namely, Scrofulous Ophthalmia: it has received different names from various authors according to its manifestation, although being in reality but one disease: there is one stage of it in which the cornea is spotted over with little pustules and ulcers, some authors giving it the name of pustular ophthalmia; another in which the conjunctiva lining the inner surface of the lids is inflamed and hypertrophied, the papilla in its structure being enlarged, constituting granular ophthalmia.

It is essentially a disease of childhood though not strictly confined to that period of life, and generally exhibits its self in connection with enlargement of the

other parts of the glandular system, such as the glands of the neck and axilla, although in some cases, we find it existing in some of its worst forms, without these attending symptoms: I have seen many cases of this character. Experience has shown that it is not essentially necessary that we should have evident disease of the lymphatic glands that a scrofulous constitution should be diagnosed: the usual evidences of constitutional disease may not show themselves in certain parts of the glandular system, on account of their inherent strength; a power of resistance given to them by nature, which enables them to resist more successfully than the eye the invasion of the affection.

That the different parts of the

glandular system vary in their power of resisting the influence of disease, and especially of this form is evident, from the fact that scrofula in some individuals exhibits its-self in the cervical glands without affecting those of the other parts of the body, and in others those of the lungs without affecting either the cervical or mesenteric glands. another example we have of the existence of this law, is the readiness with which the eye yields to the influence of the scrofulous principle after diseases of exanthematous character such as Variola, Rubiola and Scarlatina these affections reducing the strength of the organ to such an extent as to make it an easy prey to the attacks of the enemy. The causes of scrofula are unknown.

some suppose it to be a consequence of the arrest of development in the foetus, others the want of a proper degree of assimilation of food, but up to the present time, no theory has been advanced of sufficient strength to fully account for its manifestations.

Like all other diseases it may be developed by causes tending to awaken up the latent dyscrasia lurking in the system: cold, in consequence of its depressing effect, seems to be very powerful as a cause: deficiency of wholesome and strengthening food is another great cause of its development: anything having a tendency to weaken the general organism, may operate as a cause as it seems to have debility as one of its characteristic symptoms.

Regarding the changes in the fluid

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portions of the system, physiologists have found that the red globules of the blood are reduced in number, as well as vitiated in their quality; the iron, hematine and globulin are all deficient; the fibrin of the blood is below the natural standard, its healthy properties being in a measure lost, the serum is not healthy, the water, lime, and albuminous properties being increased: there seems to be a want of power in the organism to convert the food into the living organic system. The general symptoms of the disease when affecting the eye, are a redness or inflammatory condition of the eyeball and lids combined with intolerance of light, the cornea is sometimes ulcerated, the conjunctiva dotted with pustules, the lids ulcerated discharging a pus-like -

fluid; the inflammation is often inconsiderable, sometimes merely affecting the conjunctival membrane of the lids, at other times, especially at certain seasons of the year, such as spring and fall, we find not only this membrane affected, but the eyeball involved, the intolerance of light is one of the most striking symptoms of the disease, sometimes existing when we have no other sign of the affection present: this symptom evidently proceeds from weakness of the retinal membrane, for we find that if the patient be placed under the influence of a strong light he involuntarily closes his eyelids as if to keep out the light.

This weakness of the retinal membrane is undoubtedly caused by the constitutional effects of the scrofulous principle in the

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system; that it is not caused by the inflammation of the eye is evident, from the fact that we find it existing without this symptom being present. The peculiar appearance of the eyeball in serofulous ophthalmia is worthy of notice; single vessels may be seen, or vessels sometimes anastomosing forming bundles crossing the eye towards the cornea, occasionally overstepping the boundary formed by that tunic, or stopping short of its edge; at the termination of these vessels we see little pustules or vesicles, they may be situated on the conjunctiva or cornea; these little vesicles sometimes ulcerating break through into the internal parts of the eye, giving vent to the aqueous humor; there is great danger of opacity of the cornea taking place

from deposit of fluid between the layers of that membrane we often find the eyelids sore and ulcerated, very painful, the eyelashes gone in consequence of the continued inflammation so injuring the follicles as to destroy their reproductive power. In some lightly affected with the disease, we find merely slight inflammatory symptoms, where the affection remains in this state it is merely detrimental to a healthy appearance of the organ, somewhat deforming the patient in his personal appearance: but the great danger in this form of the disease is its liability to become aggravated by slight causes, such as undue exercise of function favoring thickening and ulceration of the parts more espec-

ially the cyclids. The treatment of purpura
 ulosa ophthalmia must be persevering;
 it cannot be expected that a disease which
 involves in a majority of cases the whole
 organism more or less, can be overcome
 by anything less than a careful untire-
 ing, discriminative treatment; the want
 of this perseverance is undoubtedly one
 of the principle causes that operate in
 bringing about so many failures in
 curing this disease; if our law is true
 and the victories it has achieved in the
 application of its principles to the cure of
 disease prove it to be so, we cannot fail
 if we clearly comprehend the nature of
 the remedies we use, their proper appli-
 cation in regard to dose and repetition,
 and the circumstances under which we

administer them. Meconite has been recommended by many physicians not only in the acute but in the chronic stage; undoubtedly it is of essential benefit in the acute stage in consequence of the power it possesses over the capillary system of vessels, stimulating them to contraction and thereby preventing engorgement in the capillary tubes and consequent inflammation; but the action of Meconite seems to be more transient in its character than some other very potent remedies in our materia medica therefore it is little used in the chronic forms of this disease; such remedies as Sulphur, Mercury, Iodine, Conium maculatum, are generally required in the chronic forms.

In Arsenicum we have a powerful-

remedy aiding as it does in strengthening the organism, being most especially indicated when emaciation is present, great weakness of the eyes, swollen lids, profuse discharge of scalding tears; wherever we see the effects of Arsenic in large doses we discover that its action is very powerful upon the glandular system: now what is the rationale its action, does it not act by virtue of its great power in producing great weakness, suddenly destroying nervous power, by its powerful inherent activity? The production of inflammation and ulceration in the mucous membranes cannot be referred entirely to its corrosive action, for we find that whether administered internally or applied externally its effects are the same, therefore

it must have some other mode of action, which is nothing less than a dynamic or spiritual power inherent in its very nature, being absorbed by the capillaries and thence transmitted to every part of the organism, paralysing nervous power, and thus causing an inability on the part of the general organism to sustain the normal condition of its several parts. in scrofula we have all the evidences of great depression of the entire reproductive system of organs more or less, and will therefore find Arsenic fully indicated by the following symptoms: - debility, gastric derangement, inflammation and ulceration of the mucous membrane of the lids, with granulations, secretion of glutinous, sticking pus. which -

prevents the opening of the lids in the morning, copious secretion of acrid scalding tears, causing a fine rash on the cheeks, great pain when attempting to look at objects, the conjunctiva traversed by little fine vessels, together with a general distressed condition of the whole system.

If we look at arsenic in its true aspect as a remedy in disease we must acknowledge that it has a great influence upon the glandular system of organs: the capillaries which enter into the glands being prompted to action through the influence which Arsenic possesses over the nerves which enter into their structure, what would be the result if these vessels were paralysed, their nervous pow-

er almost destroyed. Why, we should have inability of contraction, a breaking down of the vessels under the great ^{pressure} of blood contained in them, and consequent suppuration, ulceration, and ultimately destruction of the part; these symptoms are seen in scrofulous ophthalmia and of course point it out as a remedy.

We must not omit to mention Sub-phur, as one of our best, if not our best remedy; the important relation it possesses towards the destruction of psora in the system is known by every one who professes to have any knowledge of physic: its pathogenesis should be most carefully studied, as we find most if not all the symptoms of scrofulous ophthalmia showing themselves in its action in

large doses; it is indicated in hypertrophy of the mucous membrane of the lids, with burning, lachrymation, redness and engorgement of the vessels of the lids, ulceration and disorganisation of the layers of the cornea, leucoma pains in the eyeball, glutinous sticking pus upon the lids, sparks and flashes before the eyes, and especially in granular lids.

Puls, Merc, Rhus, and Calc Carb. especially the latter are also very important, and should be carefully considered, this can be done very conveniently in this disease as we have plenty of time; we must ^{not} forget the influence of good exercise in the open air when available as it aids most powerfully our medicines in their action. Lastly

we must endeavour to pierce the gloom
which surrounds this distressing disease,
try to discover its nature, and when we shall
do this, which is highly important as it
would most undoubtedly aid us in the
application of our remedies, we shall be
able to conquer it with certainty and
dispatch according to the great law:-
"Similia similibus curantur."

Alfred Zandzingers
of Pennsylvania.

Philadelphia, January 28th

. 1861.